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QUESTION OF THE COMPOSITION OF THE RELEVANT ORGANS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS

ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY COORDINATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS WITH THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

RESTRUCTURING AND REVITALIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS

Letter dated 6 September 1991 from the Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In my capacity as Coordinator of the Rio Group in New York, and acting upon the instructions of our Foreign Ministers, I have the honour to transmit to you the "General Outline for the Revitalization of the United Nations" submitted by the Permanent Mechanism for Consultation and Concerted Political Action (Rio Group) as a contribution to the forthcoming debate on this item.

This document is the product of our collective thinking and it seeks to strengthen the balance between the various organs of the system and, in particular, the Secretariat which you so efficiently and nobly head. The search for such a balance is made necessary not only because of the role which the United Nations must play but also because of the great fluidity which characterizes international relations at this time.

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* A/46/150.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and the annex thereto circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under items 77, 107, 113 and 139 of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) Fernando CEPEDA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

GENERAL OUTLINE FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PERMANENT MECHANISM FOR CONSULTATION AND CONCERTED POLITICAL ACTION (RIO GROUP)

FROM CONFRONTATION TO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

1. The international community has undergone far-reaching changes since the adoption of the San Francisco Charter. Now, the ideological conflict of the cold war is waning and major changes are taking place in Eastern Europe at a dizzying pace. Moreover, while the processes of disarmament and decolonization have not yet concluded, settlements are being negotiated in long-standing regional conflicts and increasing interest is being evinced in the so-called "new issues", such as the problems of drugs, population, the environment and human rights, the priority consideration of which must not undermine the quest for multilateral solutions to other problems which have remained on the international agenda for many years.

2. The consolidation of existing economic blocs and the formation of new ones, the steady move towards market economies, the awareness of interdependence and the continued spread of democracy are combining to shape a new international context. Nevertheless, this new reality does not reflect with equal intensity and importance the need to: set up truly effective international development cooperation machinery, reformulate the North-South dialogue in a realistic manner, and channel the resources freed by disarmament into development. In this connection, attempts must be made to deal with questions relating to poverty and hunger; to devote particular attention to the problems of women and children; to develop human resources; and to devise equitable means of sharing in the development and use of science and technology, issues which must not be viewed as being the exclusive concern of one group of countries.

3. Strengthening the foundations of international coexistence and justice in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter is the common responsibility of all States and not the exclusive prerogative of a few. The process must be open to participation, and allow for the promotion of the interests of the international community as a whole. In order to benefit from this new reality and ensure the necessary conditions for the maintenance of peace and security, growth, and economic and social development, the international community must once again review the instruments available to it in terms of the need to improve them, particularly at a time when there is broad recognition of the potential of the United Nations to successfully overcome old and new challenges.

4. We support the revitalization of the United Nations as a guiding element in strengthening the multilateral system. As in the past, we shall contribute our best efforts, experience and constructive participation in this dynamic process of adaptation and reform, which is already under way in some areas, in

the conviction that the United Nations is the central forum for handling crucial problems affecting mankind.

5. This revitalization must take place within a context of reaffirmation of international law and strict adherence to the aims and principles of the San Francisco Charter, and must, in particular, be based on respect for the principles of sovereignty, non-intervention, sovereign equality and the territorial integrity of States. This process must be based on clear mandates from the General Assembly.

6. Any renewal of the Organization to better adapt it to the challenges of a new situation must have as its objectives:

(a) To give maximum impetus to the peaceful settlement of disputes on the basis of respect for the fundamental principles of international law;

(b) To strengthen the General Assembly and the Secretary-General so as to achieve a better balance of functions between the principal organs of the United Nations;

(c) To promote an understanding of the importance of multisectoral action by the system as a whole for the success of international cooperation aimed at the growth and development of the developing countries and for dealing with other issues of global interest;

(d) To encourage joint action to promote social development and foster international conditions which will facilitate the attainment of social justice, for the benefit mainly of the sectors most affected by underdevelopment and structural adjustment policies.

7. This process must be geared towards affirming the practice of democracy in decision-making within the Organization. The increase in the number of Member States and the new political situation in the world will necessitate a review of current criteria and practices concerning appropriate representation and effective participation in the decision-making process.

8. It is essential to strengthen the decision-making machinery and to ensure that the General Assembly is the forum where issues of global interest, including the so-called "new issues", are discussed and decided. The strength and effectiveness of the Organization are closely linked to the participation of Member States in decision-making and their proper representation in the various organs and specialized agencies. It is necessary to continue and further develop the analysis of the General Assembly's methods of organization and work, and to adapt them to current demands and requirements.

9. It is urgently necessary that conceptions of global and regional security take into account the economic and social factors which affect them. The General Assembly is the appropriate forum for considering sources of insecurity and global problems which particularly concern the developing countries.

10. Agreement on purposes and principles is conducive to broad cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and regional organizations. However, it must be acknowledged that the efforts made in this area have been far from satisfactory. The era of confrontation affected the behaviour of international forums and their ability to act. In the era of cooperation that is now beginning, the role of regional organizations will have to be redefined and ad hoc regional or subregional diplomatic initiatives will have to be encouraged, recognizing the independence and influence of regional organizations and their potential for conflict resolution and for the design and implementation of strategies for balanced, sustainable development.

11. As part of an overall revitalization of the United Nations system, we must emphasize the importance of the political backing which Member States must give to the Secretary-General at all times so that he can fulfil his duties independently, thereby complying fully with the principles and aims of the United Nations. To that end, the dynamic political role required of the Secretary-General under Article 99 of the Charter should be encouraged. The impartiality and balance which the Secretary-General's tasks demand can be achieved only if he has the necessary means to undertake activities expeditiously and effectively in all areas, particularly for the maintenance of international peace and security.

12. An efficient Secretariat, and one that is equipped for the new situation, is essential. This will require administrative adjustments in keeping with the demands and requirements of United Nations activity, which is by nature particularly complex. Accordingly, special attention should be paid to the structure, make-up and composition of the Organization's senior management in order to rationalize the Secretary-General's tasks and enhance efficiency, coordination and interaction at the upper echelons.

13. The operational activities of the United Nations are a cornerstone of international cooperation. They must remain universal, multilateral, neutral, open and flexible in order to respond to the needs of all developing countries, in keeping with priorities established on the basis of development criteria which each individual recipient of cooperation is exclusively responsible for defining. It is absolutely essential that the guiding principle of operational activities for development not be the mere provision of assistance but rather that such activities should meet the needs of developing countries which, like those in our region, above all need support in sustaining their development processes.

14. Within the framework of the targets established by the United Nations in the International Development Strategy, we shall give full support to current efforts to reaffirm the leading role of the Economic and Social Council by implementing recent General Assembly resolutions, and we shall participate in the planning of other further initiatives aimed at revitalizing the role of the United Nations in the vast area of cooperation for development.

15. As United Nations activities become increasingly complex and varied, there is a need to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness, understanding these concepts to mean the fulfilment of legislative mandates with the appropriate allocation and optimum use of financial and human resources. More action-oriented policies and the establishment of a system of administrative accountability for international civil servants and specialized agencies will be required if we are to be able to evaluate means and the attainment of goals. Moreover, the goals of efficiency and effectiveness will require a review of the functioning and composition of subsidiary bodies, in an attempt to optimize them as instruments for achieving the objectives which the Organization has set itself.

16. If the United Nations is to be able to respond to the new challenges, its financial health will obviously have to be ensured. We must make sure that capacity to pay really is a guiding principle in the distribution of costs. In this connection, mechanisms must be agreed and applied for encouraging countries that are in a position to do so to increase their contributions, in order to avoid imposing heavy obligations on countries that are experiencing major difficulties in paying their external debt. In addition, a better balance must be achieved between the regular budget and extrabudgetary resources and action must be taken to ensure that all Member States pay their dues on time and in full and that spending is more effectively programmed and executed.

17. The international system that is emerging from the dynamic process of concentration and redistribution of power must not distort the principles which guide the United Nations and undermine the multilateralism of its actions. Now that the cold war is over, the international community is entertaining renewed hopes that it will be able to bring about a fundamental change in the way in which relations among countries are conceived and conducted. This moment offers us an historic opportunity to put into effect the ideals on which the San Francisco Charter is based. For this to happen, we must not replace one hostile relationship with another. Having overcome the East-West conflict, the United Nations must now give priority to North-South relations, which are the key item on the present and future multilateral agenda.

27 August 1991